

## White River's Tip Top Cafe Closes

BY BOB WOLFF

The Tip Top Café, a focal point for the LGBT community in the Upper Connecticut River Valley, as of press time is closing under financial stress.

The café, the creation of John Quimby, opened in January 2002, serving food, poetry and music in White River Junction. It helped to make the newly renovated/restored Tip Top Building, an expansive turn-of-the-20th-century bread baking facility, the centerpiece of the ongoing White River Junction renewal. The music, poetry, parties and art exhibits presented at Tip Top Café made it one of the important social centers of the area.

The café's patrons were surprised on November 7, when they received an e-mail announcing his intention to close the restaurant after dinner on Friday, November 21.

Quimby wrote, "I have recently had to make the difficult decision to close the Tip Top Café. Difficult because the café has become an amazing place with a wonderful staff, great food and lots of very happy patrons." But the restaurant is "...just not cutting it financially."

Quimby's email explained, "I have of course considered many, many alternative approaches, but all in the end seem unworkable, or, untenable. I refuse to lessen the quality of the ingredients we cook with, or to 'dumb down' the menu to appeal to a broader, blander public taste, or to purchase pre-prepared entrees to cut down on staff costs."

Quimby thanked his patrons for their "tremendous support" and said, "It is sort of like the closing of a long running theatrical performance ... there will be tears, but no regrets."

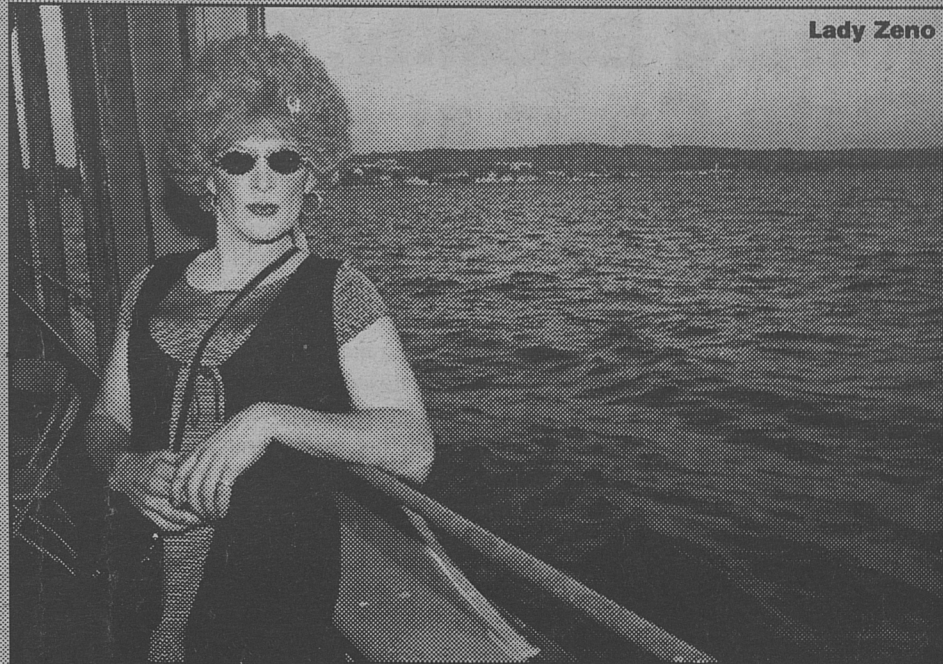
Contacted at his office, Tip Top Building developer/manager Matt Bucy said that John had done a fantastic job of creating a restaurant at Tip Top, that he hoped that Quimby would find a way to continue, and, if not, that there would be a café or restaurant at Tip Top again.

Although the Tip Top Cafe will be closed by the time OITM hits the streets, one of its favorite activities - Poetry Night - will continue at the Tip Top Building. Matte and Michael of the Cooler Gallery (also in the Tip Top Building) will host "Poetry Night at the Tip Top" in their 2nd floor gallery at 7 p.m. on the third Monday of each month.

Organizers say that those attending may read new or old work, or the work of a favorite poet, or whatever!

At press time, a week before the scheduled closing, there was a ray of hope that the restaurant would continue. Quimby said that since he made the closing announcement he has had several offers of help that he is "processing." ▼

## Lady Zeno Remembered



Lady Zeno

BY BOB BOLYARD

On Sunday, November 16, over 70 friends, drag queens and family members gathered to celebrate the life of Lady Zeno, who died November 6, reportedly a victim of suicide. The memorial event took place at the St. John's Club in Burlington, one of Lady Zeno's favorite

karaoke and drag performance venues.

Lady Zeno (a.k.a. Jason Kirby, age 29, of Bristol) burst on the local drag scene in the spring of 1998 as part of "Drag Camp Follies" presented by the House of LeMay. Since then she appeared in numerous House of LeMay productions and floats (both for Pride and Mardi Gras), always with a smile, always making people laugh. One of her most memorable bits was appearing as gubernatori-

al candidate Ruth Dwyer during the campaign of 2000. She sang "Take Back Vermont" to the tune of the Guys & Dolls classic "Take Back Your Mink." As always, she brought down the house.

However, most people will remember Lady Zeno for her fund-raising efforts for Pride Day 2000. By hosting Tuesday Night Zingo (her own personalized version of Bingo!) and taking up collections during Wednesday's Karaoke Kapers, she raised \$5000, one quarter ("Stupid tax!"), and one dollar at a time. For her efforts she was crowned the first (and only ever) "Queen of Pride."

At the Lady Zeno Memorial Social (social being her code word for "Take a drink!"), members of the House of LeMay read poems, showed video clips and even played two games of Zingo. Many other friends offered their memories through stories, jokes and laughter. In her honor, over \$250 was raised and donated to the Addison County Human Society, as requested by her family.

Lady Zeno touched the lives of thousands. She'll always be with us. "Hail Zeno! Queen of Zingo!" ▼

Bob Bolyard is a member of the House of LeMay.

## Lesbian Sues Brattleboro TV Station, Discrimination Charged in Termination

Robin Chaia Mide worked for four years as the executive director of Brattleboro Community Television (BCTV), which operates two community access stations, Channel 8 and Channel 10. That is, she ran the operation until July, 2003, when she was fired. According to her lawyer, Norman Watts, she was fired because she's a lesbian. And now she has filed a lawsuit in Windham Superior Court against BCTV for discrimination, among other charges.

John Mabie is the lawyer for BCTV. According to court documents, the station's board of directors denies any wrongdoing in Mide's firing.

Mide's suit alleges wrongful termination, breach of good faith and fair dealing, intentional and reckless infliction of emotional distress, discrimination

based on sexual orientation, and retaliatory discharge. Her lawyer says he has never seen such blatant discrimination in 20 years of employment law practice.

Mabie's response on the board's behalf alleges that Mide did not perform her duties, missed applying for an Adelphia Communications grant, and "mis-managed" \$8500 in funds.

Both parties are requesting a jury trial, damages and attorneys' fees.

Mide was working without a contract when she was fired; her contract had expired the month before. According to court documents, she continued to work under a verbal agreement with the BCTV board that a new contract was being drafted.

The complaint says that Mide was "subjected to insulting, harassing, embarrassing, intimidat-

ing and humiliating treatment," even though the station's code of conduct prohibits such behavior.

Among other allegations, the complaint says that one representative of the station referred to a heterosexual woman as a "real woman."

Watts, the lawyer for Mide, said that Mide's case is "the most blatant experience of conduct hostile to a person for membership in any group, much less for sexual orientation" that he's seen in his 15 years of labor law practice. He has, he said, worked with cases involving "pregnant women, men, older workers, and in every case the defendant denies there's discrimination involved, just as the bigots in the South did" during the black civil rights struggles.

Asked why Mide had chosen not to take her complaint to the state Human Rights

Commission, Watts said, "I'm sure she felt that a direct civil action is quicker and equally effective. They do an excellent job, but they are understaffed and underfunded."

The trial date has not yet been set, and when it is, it will allow time for the discovery process and an opportunity for mediation. If mediation fails, the case will go to trial, likely in about a year.

Watts added that he is "looking forward to going before a jury. It's the great leveler, and it's a thrill for me. But most important is that Robin is able to receive justice. She has been severely disadvantaged. This is ugly stuff."

Watts declined to make his client available for comment. "I prefer that my clients don't talk to the press before trial," he said. ▼